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In search of the soviet reader

The Kosygin reforms, sociology, and changing concepts of Soviet society, 1964-1970

À la recherche du lecteur soviétique : les réformes de Kosygin, la sociologie et les concepts en mutation de la société soviétique, 1964-1970

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SIMON HUXTABLE

IN SEARCH OF THE SOVIET READER

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In 1966, Efim Lazebnik, editor of *Rabochaia gazeta*, argued that journalists had failed to keep up with the pace of social change, and knew too little about their audience:

> At first glance it seems that we know our readers and listeners. We meet them, hear their wishes and study their critical remarks. But such knowledge is sufficient only at first glance. If we compare the changes which have occurred in the contemporary person in the last twenty years with the changes that have occurred in the journalism of the same period, then we immediately sense a noticeable rupture – and not in favour of the latter. We have to recognise that we have indeed studied our reader too little.[1]

A year later, Elena Bruskova, a journalist at youth newspaper *Komsomol´skaia pravda*, delivered a similar message about the need to reorient the paper in rapidly-changing social conditions. She asserted that the paper's core readership was aged twenty, but admitted that journalists still needed to know more about the "specific reader." Bruskova claimed that the readers of the late 1960s were more demanding and harder to write for than the young people who had read the paper at the beginning of World War II because wild shifts in Party orthodoxy regarding Stalin and Khrushchev had sown doubt in their minds.[2] Studying the audience

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1. E. Lazebnik, "I talantu nuzhna nauka [And Talent Needs Science]," *Sovetskaia pechat´* (SP), No.1 (1966), 10-11. All translations from Russian are my own.

2. "Stenogramma redaktsionnoi letuchki *Komsomol´skoi pravdy* [Stenogram of *Komsomol´skaia pravda* Editorial Meeting]" (henceforth "KP letuchka"), 17/10/67, RGASPI (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial´no-politicheskoi istorii), f. 98M (*Redaktsiia*

would thus create a more effective newspaper capable of assuaging such doubts. Lazebnik and Bruskova's comments reflected a growing belief among journalists, editors, and officials that the Soviet newspaper was failing to satisfy readers. As the Khrushchev era came to an abrupt end, the key question was how the press should adapt to their demands in the face of shifting social, cultural, and political values. Only by knowing more about readers and acting on that information, it was thought, could the press reconnect with its audience.

This article examines journalistic discussions about audiences in the years immediately following Khrushchev's ouster, focusing in particular on *Komsomol´skaia pravda* (KP). Drawing on transcripts of private editorial discussions (*letuchki*) and Party meetings, as well as articles published in the professional press, it shows how the reforms of the early Brezhnev period challenged journalists' ideas about readers. The first part shows how Kosygin's reforms, which created quasi-market conditions within the Soviet press, forced journalists to seek out the services of sociologists to provide much-needed information on audiences. However, many wondered whether this research, by creating a demand for more "reader-friendly" material, would compromise the didactic principles upon which Soviet newspapers had traditionally rested, and sought to re-assert the value of education.

The article's second part suggests that, although many journalists resisted the implications of audience research, sociology nevertheless affected the way they envisioned society. By examining the ways in which journalists represented the "contemporary" individual on the pages of the press, this article argues that a "sociological aesthetic" appeared on the pages of Soviet newspapers. Such an aesthetic departed from newspaper's Socialist Realist discourse on heroism, and focused instead on the statistically "average" individual. But as a new decade dawned, this move away from the self-effacing, optimistic heroes of the Khrushchev-era invited the question of whether the new image of the Soviet contemporary could mobilise young people for the challenges of constructing Communism.

For the journalists of the mid-1960s, the composition of the readership was something of a mystery. From the 1930s onwards, sociology was classed as a "bourgeois" science, meaning that little or no quantitative audience research was carried out. This did not cut journalists off from their readers entirely, but it did mean that they were forced to rely on the wholly inadequate combination of letters and occasional "reader conferences" to understand their audiences' interests.

This had not always been the case. Under NEP, newspapers were placed on a regime of cost-accounting (*khozraschet*), which meant that newspapers were expected – in principle, at least – to pay for themselves.[3] This created a demand for more detailed information about audiences, some of which was provided by

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Komsomol´skoi pravdy), op. 1, d. 455, l. 52. Subsequent references to KP *letuchki* will omit the archive name (RGASPI), *fond* number (98M), and *opis´* (1).

3. Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 47-53.

letters, but increasingly by sociological reader studies, too.[4] KP, established in 1925, emerged at the cutting edge of debates over the direction of the Soviet press, with heated argument amongst journalists and within the Komsomol over whether the paper should be oriented towards the *aktiv* or the mass reader, with the latter eventually winning out.[5] But by the end of the 1920s a shift in the other direction, from the masses to the *aktiv*, led to the abandonment of reader studies.[6]

However, even before Stalin's death, journalists at KP began to bridle at the preference shown to activists. In 1951, Boris Strel´nikov asked colleagues: "[F]or whom are we putting out the paper, for the wide mass reader, or just for the Komsomol *aktiv*?" He argued that KP needed to move beyond the activist audience: "Propagandists don't need this article, because propagandists can read Comrade Stalin's speech themselves," adding that leaders needed to become more enticing to the *general* reader.[7] But while similar expressions of frustration and even guilt were heard from journalists at KP and elsewhere,[8] it was only after the Twentieth Party Congress that a shift was effected from the activist reader to the mass reader.[9]

However, attempts to reorient the press foundered on a lack of concrete information. Because subscription limits were set from above, circulations provided no indication of popularity while readers' letters gave only a partial view of audience preferences. While the Soviet press did stratify its content for different audiences (*Rabotnitsa* for women; *Trud* for workers; *Komsomol´skaia pravda* for youth, etc.), this was based only on crude considerations of gender, age, and occupation. At a meeting in 1956, KP's Alan Starodub called for more research into the demographic characteristics of subscribers and proposed sending out questionnaires to find out readers' opinions. "How does our reader read the paper? It's always remained a mystery, a secret to us," he lamented a year later.[10] But the "research" that did take place was more *ad hoc*: journalists

4. Jeffrey Brooks, "Studies of the Reader in the 1920s," *Russian History*, 2-3 (1982): 187-202; Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*, Tr. Jesse Savage (Stanford, CA, 1997); Michael S. Gorham, *Speaking in Soviet Tongues: Language Culture and the Politics of Voice in Revolutionary Russia* (De Kalb, IL, 2003), 22-37.

5. Stanislav Gol´dfarb, Komsomol´skaia pravda *1925-2005. Ocherk istorii* (Irkutsk, 2008), 29-35.

6. Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), 16; Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses*, 46-69.

7. KP letuchka, 25/6/51, d. 107, l. 126-127.

8. KP Party Meeting, 23/1/50, TsKhDOPIM (Tsentr khraneniia dokumentov obshchestvenno-politicheskoi istorii Moskvy, formerly TsAOPIM), f. 1968 (Partiinaia organizatsiia *Komsomol´skoi pravdy*), op. 1, d. 25, l. 1, 4. All subsequent references to KP Party meetings will omit the archive name (TsKhDOPIM), *fond* number (1968), and *opis´* (1); KP Party Meeting, 26/1/51, d. 26, ll.4-5; KP letuchka, 25/6/51, d. 107, l. 123; 12/11/51, d. 112, l. 69, 79, 83, 85.

9. "Zhurnalist i chitatel´ [The journalist and the reader]," SP, No. 6 (1956), 1-3.

10. KP letuchka, 8/10/56, d. 126, l. 127-129, see also l. 132, 146; 17/5/57, d. 194, l. 50. See also 6/5/57, d. 193, l. 38.

observed the preferences of the buying public at a *Soiuzpechat´* kiosk, noted readers' behaviour on a tram, or conducted a straw poll of the residents of their apartment block.[11] "Reader conferences," meanwhile, were largely composed of "leading" workers whose opinions were unrepresentative.[12]

Without statistical evidence, journalists were forced to engage in guesswork, with the average reader reckoned to be fifteen and sixteen year-olds by some, and between eighteen and twenty by others.[13] Others were apt to imagine the reader that suited them: the paper's Deputy Responsible Secretary Grigorii Oganov claimed that the paper's reader was "firstly, active and ready for action; secondly, a thoughtful person; thirdly, a person with a critical disposition; and fourthly, a person who is more intellectual than we thought…"[14] Oganov thus concluded that readers endorsed the paper's focus on "educating" the reader which, as Thomas C. Wolfe and Natalia Roudakova have shown, formed an important part of the identity of *shestidesiatniki* journalists.[15] Evidence to the contrary was sometimes ignored: editor Iurii Voronov stated in 1962 that excessive reliance on readers' opinions was unacceptable: "some comrades try to reinforce their argument by relying on the opinion of readers. That's not right."[16] Instead, he insisted that readers were there to be "take[n] by the hand and mould[ed]."[17] So while some within the *redaktsiia* recognised the need to know more about readers' opinions, others – very often those more active in the Party and Komsomol – maintained a highly patrician view of the social role of the newspaper which challenged this curiosity.

On October 18, 1964, *Pravda* announced that subscription limits for central newspapers and journals would be abolished, bringing about profound changes in the direction of the Soviet press.[18] While newspapers in the early 1960s had been encouraged to compete, this had little meaning when the overall "winner" was decided by planners. But now that Kosygin's reforms allowed for circulations to rise and fall with demand, journalists would find out how popular their titles really were. This mattered on a professional level, because journalists cared about how readers and peers viewed their work, and also on a political level, because

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11. Ibid., 9/4/56, d. 171, l. 43; 4/8/64, d. 365, l. 38; 6/12/56, d. 177, l. 200; KP Party-Komsomol meeting, 13/12/61, d. 35, l. 161-62.

12. E.g. GARF (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi federatsii), f. R1244 (Redaktsiia *Izvestii*), op. 1, d. 157, 1-41.

13. KP letuchka, 22/11/54, d. 133, l. 162; 11/2/57, d. 190, l. 65.

14. KP Party Meeting, 29/6/62, d. 37, l. 17.

15. Thomas C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Soviet Person after Stalin* (Bloomington, IN, 2005), 33-70; Natalia Roudakova, "From the Fourth Estate to the Second Oldest Profession: Russia's Journalists in Search of their Public after Socialism." Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 2007, 69-70, 84-85.

16. KP letuchka, 29/6/62, d. 37, l. 60.

17. Ibid., l. 61. See also 13/12/61, d. 35, l. 173-174.

18. "Million obshchestvennykh rasprostranitelei pechati [A million public distributors of the press]", *Pravda*, 18/10/64, 6.

circulations were now viewed as a marker of quality work – a way of seeing if journalists were fulfilling "the plan."[19]

Before 1964, the main statistical measure of a newspaper's quality in the eyes of the authorities had been the size of its postbag.[20] But such measures were inaccurate, not only because letter-writers were unrepresentative of the audience as a whole, but because newspapers were able to exploit the system (for example, by running competitions for the express purpose of attracting "letters").[21] Now, however, circulations supplanted letters as a more "objective" measure of popularity. According to Deputy Editor Boris Pankin, the move to open subscriptions was a test of "how readers judge the work of our paper, and the work of every one of us. It is an all-Union election, if you like."[22] By calling the battle for sales an "election," Pankin illustrated the changed – and by implication *democratic* – relationship between reader and journalist. Leningrad sociologist and media executive Boris Firsov argued in a 1967 article that

> by depositing their money for subscriptions, readers in some way give their vote to the publications which answer most keenly to the themes of the day, stand at the centre of events, and answer the multi-faceted demands of readers.[23]

But KP's response to Kosygin's reforms somewhat contradicted the idea that this was some kind of consumer "democracy." Between 1965 and 1968, the paper embarked on numerous promotional campaigns, ranging from newspaper, radio and TV advertisements to "agit buses" which toured the country alongside travelling brigades of poets.[24] Komsomol members were pressured to "voluntarily" subscribe to Komsomol publications, while Komsomol organisations which failed to assist the campaign were criticised for missing the "educational" potential of the campaign – and the fact that subscriptions provided "one of the most important means for replenishing the Komsomol budget".[25] Prizes were offered to the members who enlisted the most subscribers, while the press was encouraged to

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19. Circulations may also have influenced salaries: see RGANI (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arhiv noveishei istorii), f. 5, op. 33, d. 224, l. 15, 41.

20. E.g. RGASPI, f. 1M, op. 32, d. 764.

21. B. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii v zerkale oprosov obshchestvennogo mneniia. Zhizn´ 2-aia: Epokha Brezhneva* [Four Lives of Russia in the Mirror of Public Opinion. Life 2: the Brezhnev Epoch] (M., 2001), 17.

22. KP letuchka, 21/9/65, d. 385, l. 68.

23. B. Firsov, "Massovaia kommunikatsiia [Mass Communications]," *Zhurnalist*, No. 2 (1967), 51.

24. RGASPI, f. 1M, op. 32, d. 1213, l. 145-151; d. 1213, l. 176-181; RGASPI, f. 98M, op. 1, d. 440, l. 1-2; Ibid., d. 458, l. 68.

25. RGASPI, f. 98M, op. 1, d. 419, l. 13. Enlisting Komsomol and Party members ("public distributors") to pressure others to subscribe was common practice even before 1964. We might therefore suggest that this case represents an adaptation of established procedures to changed circumstances. See, for example, ERAF (Eesti Riigiarhiivi Filiaali), 1/81/15/22-23; 31/35/112/20-21.

publish laudatory articles to these new Stakhanovites of distribution.[26] In other words, the paper's rapid increase in circulation was not just about consumer choice, as Pankin and Firsov had argued, but also depended on papers' ability to enlist institutional connections to increase audiences.[27]

But while such aggressive marketing techniques might suggest that journalists were more interested in coercing readers than winning them over, this is a misapprehension. Even if individuals were forced to subscribe, they still exercised choice over which titles. While circulations for most publications rose, they could also go in the other direction, most notably at *Pravda*, where journalists engaged in a bout of soul searching after the paper (temporarily) ceded its position to *Izvestiia* as the most-read title.[28] Moreover, there was widespread acknowledgement that Soviet media was not operating in a vacuum: Western radio stations were increasingly broadcasting news and entertainment material that attracted the public's attention.[29] This made understanding the tastes of audiences an urgent strategic priority, and led newspapers towards a more far-reaching response to Kosygin's reforms: audience research.

TABLE 1: Change in circulations of leading Soviet newspapers, 1964-1966[30]

	1964	1965	1966	Overall change, 1964-1966 (%)
KP	4.2	5.7	6.6	+ 57.1
Sel´skaia zhizn´	4.0	6.2	6.2	+ 55.0
Izvestiia	6.0	6.0	8.0	+ 33.3
Sovetskaia Rossiia	2.5	3.15	3.3	+ 32.0
Trud	1.67	1.77	1.95	+ 16.8
Pravda	6.7	6.7	6.45	- 3.7

The ascendancy of empirical sociology in the mid- to late-1960s was the endpoint of a long-term process beginning in the mid-1950s through which, slowly but

26. RGASPI, f. 98M, op. 1, d. 419, l. 14; RGASPI, f. 1M, op. 32, d. 1213, l. 145-151.

27. On circulations: TsKhDOPIM, f. 1968, op. 1, d. 40, l. 25. On the link between institutional apparatuses and circulations: Mikhail Nenashev, *An Ideal Betrayed: Testimonies of a Prominent and Loyal Member of the Soviet Establishment* (London, 1995), 50-51.

28. E.g. Pravda Party Meeting, 15/10/65, TsKhDOPIM, f. 3226 (Partiinaia organizatsiia *Pravdy*), op. 1, d. 74, l. 136.

29. See, for example, Simo Mikkonen, "Stealing the Monopoly of Knowledge?: Soviet Reactions to US Cold War Broadcasting," *Kritika*, 11, 4 (2010): 771-805.

30. *Letopis´ periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR, 1961-1965. Chast´ II: Gazety* [Chronicle of Periodical Publications USSR, 1961-1965. Part II: Newspapers] (M., 1967); *Letopis´ periodicheskikh izdanii SSSR, 1966-1970. Chast´ II: Gazety* [Chronicle of Periodical Publications USSR, 1966-1970. Part II: Newspapers] (M., 1975); KP figures from RGANI, f. 5, op. 55, d. 76, l. 170-172; RGASPI, f. 98M, op. 1, d. 390, l. 17; RGASPI, f. 98M, op. 1, d. 440, l. 1-2. These figures differ slightly from those in *Letopis´*, which suggests a 51.9% rise in KP's circulation.

surely, sociological research was legitimated.[31] There was, however, a significant lag between the popularisation of sociological research in the early-1960s and its application to the press.[32] As Vladimir Shliapentokh, the leading media sociologist of the period, observed, newspapers' inability to navigate market conditions forced them to pay renewed attention to their readership and commission such research.[33] As in the 1920s, there was an upsurge in interest in sociologists' work. Between 1965 and 1968, many of the main newspapers of the Soviet Union including *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, and *Trud* carried out such studies; at KP, the paper's in-house sociological institute, the Institute of Public Opinion (IOM) was called upon to do the same, with founder Boris Grushin initially lamenting the "almost complete absence of a scientifically founded understanding of [the press's] audience."[34] The results of these studies were widely disseminated in the scholarly proceedings of the Academy of Sciences, the professional journal *Sovetskaia pechat´/Zhurnalist*, and were discussed in detail at the Second Congress of the Union of Journalists in 1966.

What was the impact of such research? Interviewed in 2000, Shliapentokh dismissed exaggerated claims for the effectiveness of reader studies, and claimed that they were a marker of a newspaper's "progressive" orientation rather than a catalyst for change.[35] Nevertheless, he admitted that some journalists were shocked by his findings, which overturned many stereotypes about readers.[36] Take, for example, the first of the IOM's reader studies at KP, which examined the views of almost five-hundred lapsed subscribers and found that more than a third believed the paper had of late become less interesting.[37] Journalists saw this as an indictment of their work, and launched into a debate on whether the paper's material was written at the right level for its young readers. Editor-in-Chief Iurii Voronov argued that KP was losing readers because it was becoming too highbrow. He scorned the idea that

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31. Martine Mespoulet, "La 'renaissance' de la sociologie en URSS (1958-1972): Une voie étroite entre matérialisme historique et 'recherches sociales concrètes'," *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, 16 (2007): 57-86.

32. In Estonia, by contrast, Finnish TV and radio could be received, creating quasi-market conditions. Here, as well as in Soviet cinema, where there was a desire to maximise audiences, audience research thrived, illustrating the link between competition and audience research. See Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 2011), 168-169; Joshua First, "From Spectator to 'Differentiated' Consumer: Film Audience Research in the Era of Developed Socialism (1965-80)," *Kritika*, 9, 2 (2008): 333.

33. V. Shliapentokh, ed., *Chitatel´ i gazeta. Vyp. 1: Chitateli* Truda [Reader and Newspaper. Vol.1: Readers of *Trud*] (M., 1969), 11-12.

34. Hoover Institution Archives (HIA), Boris Grushin papers, Box 4, Folder 3.

35. V. Shliapentokh, "Ia znal, chto dumaiut chitateli *Izvestii*, *Pravdy*, *Truda*, *Literaturnoi gazety* [I knew what the readers of *Izvestiia*, *Trud*, and *Literaturnaia gazeta* were thinking]," in A. Volkov, M. Pugacheva, S. Iarmoliuk, eds., *Pressa v obshchestve (1959-2000): Otsenki zhurnalistov i sotsiologov. Dokumenty* [The Press in Society (1959-2000). The appraisal of Journalists and Sociologists. Documents] (M., 2000), 113.

36. Ibid., 110-111.

37. KP letuchka, 7/9/65, d. 385, l. 58-62.

the paper should try to rival *Literaturnaia gazeta*, a newspaper with a circulation of around a tenth of KP's: "We are a mass newspaper and we need every one of us, every worker, to learn to look at the paper through the eyes of the mass reader".[38]

Voronov's reference to the "mass reader" occurred frequently in journalists' conversations, but carried contradictory meanings. It had connotations of the public ("the masses") as a force to be mobilised through education, but was also associated with an unreliable, unengaged reader, whose attention needed to be grabbed. However, by personifying the audience in terms of a single "mass reader," journalists ignored evidence that different demographic groups had different requirements. Sociologists Iurii Kurganov and Tamara Kharlamova argued that:

> The newspaper is read by a concrete person, of a particular age, of a particular profession, occupying a particular social position. And the sum of all these components, which characterise each individual, cannot but influence their perception of newspaper material.[39]

Similar sentiments could also be heard in the corridors of power: a 1966 Komsomol report stated that

> Today's newspaper can no longer orient itself towards the "average" reader. It simply doesn't exist. There are defined groups of youth with professional, age, and educational differences.[40]

Yet KP journalists displayed a stubborn refusal to abandon traditional notions of the readership. In part, this may have been due to the fact that the paper had added 2.4 million readers in two years.[41] It could also have something to do with the fact that journalists' professional identity depended on their enlightenment role, and on seeing *their* readers as more educated. There was, for example, much pride in a 1967 survey that showed that KP readers considered Grigorii Kozintsev's adaptation of *Hamlet* to have been the best film of recent times, in contrast to the readers of other papers, who preferred the blockbuster *Amphibian Man*.[42] Kim Kostenko claimed that while the results were "flattering," the survey showed that the paper needed to take into account the mass nature [*Massovost´*] of the paper. This meant education: in Kostenko's analogy, those with populist tastes would be "trained" like schoolchildren being taught to read, while others could be offered more challenging material.[43] Here, then, the question of *massovost´* was a question

38. Ibid., l. 60-62. Similar scenes took place at other papers: see Shliapentokh, "Ia znal," 111.

39. Iu. Kurganov, T. Kharlamova, "Anketa protiv mifa [Questionnaire Against Myth]," *Zhurnalist*, No. 7 (1967), 32.

40. RGASPI, f. 1M, op. 34 (Agitprop), d. 52, l. 22.

41. RGASPI, f. 1M, op. 34, d. 49, l. 70.

42. KP letuchka, 12/4/67, d. 449, l. 14-15.

43. Ibid., l. 3

of creating a paper which would educate both groups equally: it did not mean "sinking to the level of those who admire[d] *Amphibian Man*".[44]

Sociologists were not immune to this educational impulse – perhaps because they were also members of the editorial staff who had invested in the prevailing professional values. One of the IOM's researchers, Anna Pavlova, warned colleagues of the "psychological costs" of confusing the tastes of the intelligentsia with those of society as a whole and was one of the few journalists to argue that the paper needed to find a different approach for different demographic groups.[45] However, she lamented the fact that readers under the age of twenty did not enjoy reading "serious" articles and called for journalists to work to create a "serious reader," claiming that a good newspaper, like a good novel, should always be "a bit boring."[46] Hence, reader research did not lead to the abandonment of the educational impulse that characterised the Khrushchev era. The rhetoric of the "mass reader" signified the need for the paper to become more engaging to readers, but more than this, it reflected the desire of journalists to retain their sense of the readership *as a public to be transformed.*

However, for others at the paper the concept of the "mass reader" became a way of punishing deviations from the perceived middle ground. Grigorii Oganov (who, three years before, had lauded the reader as "more intellectual" than journalists had thought) came under attack for his highbrow writing style, and was reminded of his obligation to "write so that articles are addressed to as wide an audience as possible."[47] Though the paper's more "literary" journalists protested, the IOM's research provided ballast for attacks. For example, a rubric called "100 lines by a *publitsist*," which published *belletristic* material by the paper's correspondents, was highly praised by many, yet surveys showed that it was one of the ten least read sections, an unhappy group which also included "Workers' Planning Meeting" and "We Invite You to the World of the Philatelist."[48] Surveys showed widespread dissatisfaction with the length of articles, with one lapsed subscriber commenting that he had "no time to read a paper" which was "full of long articles."[49]

Yet journalists set much store by article length, which was a marker of journalistic status (as well as a path to a higher honorarium).[50] One correspondent said mockingly: "If a piece is long I don't read it, but I go and congratulate [the journalist]: 'well done, it's good' …" He contrasted journalists' "psychological attraction to large pieces" with their condescending attitude shorter items, which were considered as a mere "trifle" or "garnish."[51] To this extent, the IOM's research

44. Ibid., l. 15. Cf. Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses*, 38-45.

45. Ibid., 16/11/67, d. 458, l. 82.

46. Ibid., l. 86-88. See also 18/9/66, d. 438, l. 35-36.

47. Ibid., 17/8/65, d. 385, l. 15.

48. Ibid., l. 24-25; 1/6/66, d. 430, l. 6; HIA, Box 4, Folder 5.

49. KP letuchka, 7/9/65, d. 385, l. 58-59.

50. "Proizvodstvenno-tvorcheskogo soveshchaniia o rabote KP [Production-Creative Meeting on the Work of KP]," 16/11/67, RGASPI, f. 98M, op. 1, d. 458, l. 174.

51. Ibid., l. 118.

prompted change: one journalist even claimed that a "psychological revolution in the minds of journalists," was taking place at a paper where the rule had always been "twelve pages, never write less."[52]

The key question was how journalists would adapt to audiences' changing demands. Correspondent Vladimir Orlov argued that Soviet audiences were now part of a world in which they were bombarded with information from the press, radio and television, and cinema and literature, and were forced to choose between them. "Through their selection," argued Orlov, "readers spontaneously define what is most interesting for them."[53] Here, Orlov's imagined reader showed discernment in choosing between different titles, and this choice was not to be denigrated, but accommodated.

But what sort of press would be appropriate for this mediatised world? Some at the paper believed that the paper needed "sensations" – the sort of material that would ensure that, as Kondakov put it, readers were "tearing the paper from [each other's] hands."[54] Newspaper audiences expressed a preference for news, human-interest stories, and entertainment-led material over economic and industrial discussion or anything that reeked too strongly of "education," such as Marxist-Leninist materials or "patriotic" stories.[55] According to an IOM survey of 1966, KP readers were most interested in court reports[56], which had always been an ideologically problematic genre because its focus on crime was thought to appeal to readers' salacious instincts.[57]

Some newspapers were apparently prepared to satisfy such interests: reprimands handed out to *Sovetskaia Rossiia* in 1965 for articles on kidnapping and drug addiction showed how journalistic values were changing under the pressure of reader demand.[58] But an editorial published in *Sovetskaia pechat´* in 1966 criticised the "dark sides" of this "pursuit of subscriptions."[59] While agreeing that it was "completely natural and correct" for publications to turn a profit, the editorial wondered whether commercial considerations should be the only criteria:

> What won't journalists do for an "increase" in circulation? They look for any old oddity so as to capture the imagination of the reader. The saddest thing is

52. Ibid., l. 116.

53. KP letuchka, 18/9/66, d. 439, l. 2.

54. Ibid., 26/4/66, d. 427, l. 47.

55. See also V. Shliapentokh, *Sotsiologiia dlia vsekh* [Sociology for All] (M., 1970), 176. TV sociologists made similar observations, see Christine Evans, "From *Truth* to *Time*: Soviet Central Television 1957-1985." Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2012, 68-72.

56. HIA, Box 4, Folder 5.

57. However, they could also assuage public fears about crime: see Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform After Stalin* (Ithaca, NY, 2008), 44-48, 179-184.

58. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism*, 112-113.

59. "Otvetstvennost´ pered chitatelem [Responsibility Before Readers]," SP, No.7 (1966): 1-2.

> that the creative pen of certain capable journalists gradually begins to adjust to this demand: to attract readers, to strike them with an unusual photograph, to please them with something peculiar, to satisfy what are, in effect, sometimes backward interests.[60]

In discussions surrounding audiences there seemed to be a fear of going "too far," lest producers begin pandering to the public's seemingly uncultured appetite for sensations.[61]

All of this shows that the information provided by sociologists could be put to a range of different uses. While KP journalists recognised the importance of audience research, seeing in it a means for maximising circulations and getting closer to the reader, this did not lead to the "psychological revolution" that some had hoped for. Though there were attempts to increase the quantity of news material and curb journalists' graphomania, news stories still lacked timeliness and long articles remained the rule rather than the exception. Ultimately, it was journalists' own educational ethos and notions of professional excellence as much as ideological pressure that stood in the way of lasting reform of the Soviet newspaper. While sociological research revealed new information about readers, journalists were unsure about how this should translate onto the pages of the press and sought to retain their own vision of the "mass reader" at all costs – no matter how much reader studies challenged its existence.

We have seen how sociological research provided journalists with new information on readers, and also their reluctance to act on it. But this new-found knowledge nevertheless changed the way journalists viewed the public and represented it to readers. In this section of the article, I explore journalists' shifting visions of the social body by analysing a rubric that appeared in the paper between 1967 and 1969 called "Social Portrait." In their use of social research and abandonment of the "exceptional" individual as the object of discussion, the portraits swapped Khrushchev-era's "romantic" aesthetic for a sociological aesthetic that emphasised a new cast of characters and pointed the way towards the discourse of "developed socialism" that became prevalent in the 1970s.

The appearance of such "social portraits" owed much to journalists' search for more complex and psychologically convincing heroes after Khrushchev's ouster. To be sure, the Khrushchev era witnessed an equally significant shift from the Stakhanovite heroes of the Stalin era to more "sincere" and "authentic" portraits of "ordinary" heroes, who displayed doubts about their abilities but ultimately overcame them. However, the *Wanderlust* and naïve optimism that characterised the heroes of the Khrushchev era seemed out of place – and even damaging – under

60. Ibid., 2.

61. Note film critics' anxieties about "filmmakers who stud[ied] the audience's habits only to exploit them" (First, 330) and Gosteleradio Chairman Nikolai Mesiatsev's reluctance to "chase after majority tastes" (Evans, "From *Truth* to *Time*…," 62).

a new leadership that was striving to build the future on rational, technocratic calculation.[62] A 1965 article by writer Leonid Zhukhovitskii focused on the damaging effects of "abstract romanticism."[63] He attacked the mass media's attempts to try to "cash in" on young people's youthful romanticism and the so-called "*romantika* of the train ticket," which implied that only life in the wilderness was authentic. For recent MGU graduate Vitalii Ignatenko, Zhukovitskii's article starkly illustrated the side-effects of the paper's unthinkingly rosy depiction of hardship.[64] He criticised the fact that the paper's heroes tended to be manual workers – "steeplejacks, plumbers, constructors – people who must perform great feats" – and claimed that the paper too often focused on those "outside the material sphere, the sphere of everyday life [byta]."[65]

As Iganatenko's comments illustrate, as the fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution approached, journalists were beginning to take stock of Soviet society, seeing in the disciplines of sociology and statistics a means of creating a more representative portrait of the modern individual. The same Komsomol report that claimed that the "average reader" was a fiction also argued that audiences demanded a new way of portraying the individual.[66] The report mentioned a number of new forms that had recently appeared in Soviet newspapers, such as the "interview-portrait," the "research sketch," and the "social portrait" of the contemporary hero. Such forms of analytical journalism were becoming increasingly popular, especially in the work of *Izvestiia*'s Genadii Lisichkin and Anatolii Agranovskii, and *Ekonomicheskaia gazeta*'s Anatolii Gudimov.[67] Even more "traditional" heroic sketches, such as *Smena*'s 1968 cycle of sketches "Your Alumni, Komsomol!," focused on professions and contained discussion (albeit limited) of a changing Soviet society.[68] Professional publications like *Zhurnalist* praised such figures as exemplars and sought to portray journalists as "researchers" of reality, rather than a Party propagandists.[69] Such a turn of events most likely reflected journalists' striving for cultural capital by occupying territory that belonged to academics, but

62. On the heroes of the Khrushchev era see Huxtable, "A Compass in the Sea of Life: Soviet Journalism, the Public, and the Limits of Reform after Stalin, 1953-1968." Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of London, 2012, 143-188; on criticism of this under Brezhnev see S. Bol´shakova, "Muzhestvo videt to, chto est [The Courage to See What Really Is]," SP, No.10 (1966): 8-10.

63. L. Zhukovitskii, "Kto podnimaet parus? [Who is Raising the Sail?]," KP, 2/6/65, 2.

64. KP letuchka, 8/6/65, d. 383, l. 1-2.

65. On this point see B. Pankin, "Effekt romantiki," [The Effect of Romanticism], KP, 20/7/65, 2-3.

66. RGASPI, f. 1M, op. 34, d. 52, l. 4.

67. G. Lisichkin, "Plan i rynok: nauchnaia diskussiia dlia massovoi auditorii [Plan and Market: Scientific Discussion for a Mass Audience]," in Volkov, Pugacheva, Iarmoliuk, eds., *Pressa v obshchestve*, 66-82; Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism*, Ch.2; A. Gudimov, *Taina chuzhoi professii* [The Secret of Another's Profession] (M., 1967).

68. E.g. A. Batashev, "Genovaite Svirplene," *Smena*, 5 (1968), 1.

69. E.g. M. Shur, "ChP? Ne obiazatel´no [Emergency? It Doesn't Have to Be]," SP, No.1 (1964), 22.

it was also a consequence of their desire to produce more complex descriptions of contemporary society.

Prompted by the Komsomol's suggestions, in February 1967 KP began its series of "Social Portraits." Each portrait featured a representative of a particular occupation, discussing protagonists' everyday lives and, using sociological data, raising issues which would face the country as it moved into a new era.[70] The portraits differed from the time-honoured odes to heroic milkmaids and toiling factory workers insofar as they sought to describe how *typical* their protagonists were, rather than how *exceptional*.[71] In a sense, the sketches marked a shift from one meaning of "*geroi*" to another: from "hero" to "protagonist." Their tone was openly anti-romantic and anti-heroic: one author admitted that his instinct was to write a "hymn to the teacher," but then vowed to "try to look at his work without any romantic embellishment."[72] Some even admitted that their protagonists were not quite paragons of virtue: one author confessed that his protagonist, a taxi driver, had picked up several reprimands and was "far from a saint," but was nevertheless "uncommonly sincere, and able to be himself from beginning to end."[73] Thus, what seemed most important in the selection of protagonists was not their virtues, but their verisimilitude.

Whether by excising false pathos or admitting their protagonists' flaws, the inclusion of such "typical" heroes on the pages of KP was an attempt to provide a more accurate picture of Soviet reality than hitherto. The "scientific" data provided by sociology was an important part of this search for accuracy. First of all, they could be considered to be a form of "time-budget" study, an area of sociology which investigated Soviet citizens' use of work and leisure time and underwent a renaissance in the 1960s.[74] In this vein, many articles detailed the small print of their protagonists' everyday routines, such as special correspondent Valerii Agranovskii's detailing of the daily habits of a fuel truck driver from Saratov, or Valerii Kondakov's statistical discussion of the administrative burdens of young scientists.[75] By analysing not just work time but also free time, these portraits implicitly endorsed the idea that individuals had a right to fulfilment in both public and private life, and suggested that the Soviet Union was creating the conditions for self-realisation.[76]

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70. The twelve portraits were: driver, shepherd, fisherman, teacher, steel worker, young scientist, doctor, engineer, taxi driver, docker, waiter, architect.

71. We might compare this to village prose and its focus on the "ordinary," hard-working individual, though admittedly the genre was peripheral under Khrushchev.

72. I. Ziuziukin, "Uchitel´ [Teacher]," KP, 6/6/67, 2.

73. I. Ziuziukin, "Taksist [Taxi driver]," KP, 16/8/68, 4.

74. Elizabeth Weinberg, *Sociology in the Soviet Union and Beyond: Social Enquiry and Social Change* (Ashgate, 2004), 103-134.

75. V. Agranovskii, "Shofer [Driver]," 9/2/67, 2; V. Kondakov, "M.N.S. [Junior Scientific Researcher]," KP, 26/9/67, 2. Valerii Agranovskii was the brother of *Izvestiia*'s Anatolii.

76. A similar trend was promoted in Czechoslovakian mass media after 1968. See Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, NY, 2010), 177-200.

The imprimatur of sociology was also present in the choice of protagonists. Just as audience studies allowed journalists like Anna Pavlova to declare that the paper's "average" reader was aged between 21 and 28, lived in a middling town in Ukraine, carried out public work, and liked to read articles on international life, the paper's "social portraits" aimed to analyse the "average" individual, as defined through statistical measures.[77] The paper's first portrait referred to the process of finding a subject:

> Earlier, in the editorial offices, through columns of statistics we calculated a portrait of the "average" driver, whom I now had to find. Age: 25-35 years old, education: 7 years; work experience: no less than 5 years, etc.[78]

The author of another portrait claimed it was based on sociological research conducted by the Komsomol, interviews with 900 young scientists, 100 "expert conversation-interviews", statistical data, and stenograms of conferences and meetings.[79] The paper thus swapped one kind of "typicality" for another. The heroes of the past had been exceptional because they displayed traits that few others could match, but typical insofar as these traits would one day be ubiquitous. The paper's social portraits, meanwhile, implied that "typical" meant "ordinary": they looked for the most common – and not necessarily the most virtuous.

But despite their concern with asking questions about Soviet society, there remained blind spots. Gender was one of them: of the twelve social portraits published between 1967 and 1969, only one, a doctor, was female.[80] To the extent that women did appear, it was usually in the guise of housewives and mothers rather than as colleagues (this was even the case in the portrait of the female doctor): indeed, one publication considered this latter role to be a *podvig*.[81] Natalia Baranskaia's well-known story *A Week Like Any Other*, which appeared in late 1969, forms an interesting point of comparison, centring as it does around a sociological questionnaire on women's lives which leads to a discussion of the intolerable burdens placed on women in Soviet society.[82] Such debates were all but invisible in the paper's portraits: in fact labour (or, at least, *waged* labour) was

77. "Proizvodstvenno-tvorcheskogo soveshchaniia o rabote KP," 16/11/67, RGASPI, f. 98M, op. 1, d. 458, l. 82. Pavlova's use of the term was possibly heuristic, but also reflective of a continued confusion over the existence (or not) of the "average" reader.

78. Agranovskii, "Shofer," 2.

79. Kondakov, "M.N.S.," 1.

80. I. Ziuziukin, "Vrach [Doctor]," KP 3/3/68, 1-3. Some within the KP *redaktsiia* criticised the fact that the teacher was a male when female teachers predominated (KP letuchka, 6/6/67, d. 452, l. 3).

81. L. Aizerman, "Vsegda li v zhizni est´ mesto podvigam? [Is there Always Space for Heroic Deeds in Life?]," *Iunost´*, No.8 (1967): 84; Ziuziukin, "Vrach," 3/3/68, 1-3.

82. N. Baranina, "Nedelia kak nedelia [A Week Like Any Other]," *Novyi mir*, 11 (1969): 23-55.

gendered as "male," and even professions (such as teaching) traditionally coded as female were here represented by men.[83]

These portraits might therefore be seen as a response to the "crisis of masculinity" that was beginning to be discussed in the late 1960s. This discussion initially focused on higher mortality rates, but also had at its heart the changing discourses on labour, and the increasing focus on private consumption which were apparently rendering traditional male roles obsolete.[84] Such a view is supported by the comments of correspondent Vladimir Ponizovskii, who said of Vitalii Ignatenko's 1968 sketch about a male waiter, that it showed the "everyday profession of a person who in our society is unjustly considered to be second-class, servile (*kholuiskii*), unbecoming of a man, obsolete in our century, and bearing the weight of the accursed past."[85] Thus, one explanation for the curious lack of equality in these portraits is that they were an attempt to show how alternative types of work – particularly in the service industry – were acceptably "masculine" in a changing world of labour.

But while the image of labour was altering, work nevertheless continued to be depicted as a bedrock of self-identity and as a source of self-expression. In a portrait of a taxi driver, Ziuziukin spoke of witnessing "the miracle of transformation which happens to us when we are creating." He likened the taxi driver's rapture at the wheel as being "the same entranced delight with which a violinist who hasn't touched their violin for a long time touches the strings" and spoke of him performing the "music of movement along the dimly neon-lit streets of Moscow by night".[86] Worker-correspondent Mikhail Sokol suggested that when he sat on the metro, he did not know whether he was sitting opposite a steelworker, a student, or a doctor, concluding: "the external way of life of the worker and the intellectual can barely be distinguished, and we stopped being surprised by that a long time ago."[87] This was a world where shepherds were poets, and scientists were accomplished songwriters whose compositions were played on national radio.[88] This, then, was a second key omission in the portraits: class difference. By erasing the differences between manual and intellectual labour, the portraits were possibly responding to the growing unattractiveness of manual labour to Soviet young people, and the increasing importance of the creative content of work.[89] Although we do not know have access to discussions surrounding the planning of the rubric, it may not be an

83. However, the paper did publish material on the "women question," e.g. "Sprosim nashikh muzhchin [Let us ask our men]," KP, 27/5/66, 2.

84. Elena Zdravomyslova, Anna Temkina, "The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse," *Russian Studies in History*, 51/2 (2012): 13-34.

85. KP letuchka, 20/11/68, d. 472, l. 43.

86. I. Ziuziukin, "Taksist," 4. This rhetorical device stretched further than KP (e.g. Batashev, "Genovaite Svirplene")

87. M. Sokol, "Slesar´ [Metalworker]," KP, 3/9/67, 1.

88. Liashenko, "Chaban [Shepherd]," KP, 19/3/67, 1; Kondakov, "M.N.S.," 2.

89. See A. Zdravomyslov, V. Rozhin, V. Iadov, eds., *Chelovek i ego rabota. Sotsiologicheskoe issledovaniie* [The Individual and Their Work. Sociological Research], (M., 1967); RGANI, f. 5, op. 34, d. 119, l. 242-243.

accident that more portraits focused on manual than intellectual labour. By creating the worker-intellectual journalists were thus mirroring sociologists who, despite suggesting ways in which society was stratified by various markers of occupation, education, and age, also posited a movement towards social *convergence*, embodied by the figure of the "worker-intellectual."[90]

But what sort of society were these portraits depicting? By focusing on the features of the present without reference to the future, journalists at KP were – whether consciously or not – outlining the contours of a policy that became known as "Developed Socialism." The absence of class difference in the portraits mirrored a 1967 Party resolution, which suggested that "class and national antagonism" had disappeared from Soviet life.[91] Instead, the discourse of "Developed Socialism" meant that revolutionary transition would be indefinitely suspended, and that the Party "could work purely within the existing parameters of society."[92]

This gave rise to a new kind of rhetoric which emphasised the benefits of the present. Soviet mass media began to advance a "middle class" identity, which emphasised the "post-collectivist" values of "individuality, self-reliance, and privatism (sic)."[93] One of the most striking features of this identity was the extent to which productive energies became decoupled from Party and Komsomol. Though some protagonists were Komsomol members, this no longer seemed to be a mobilising factor. Such a retreat from official structures was not entirely new (it can be seen in the portraits of the Khrushchev era), but its continuation into the Brezhnev period suggests that journalists were mirroring a more widespread hollowing out of the Party's authority.[94]

However, it could equally be argued that protagonists displayed a collective code of morality which, while not explicitly called "Communist," was nevertheless informed by its ideals: individuals pooled their resources to help out a driver who stood to lose out on work, even though it meant they would earn less; doctors displayed a sense of duty to others; scientists were motivated by a collective desire for knowledge.[95] In this sense, the rhetoric of professionalism served to strengthen, rather than erode, collectivist values. Moreover, as Paulina Bren has argued in a study of Czechoslovakian television after 1968, the language of de-politicization could serve as a conscious political strategy, designed to alert citizens to the everyday comforts and leisure opportunities that the "quiet life" offered.[96]

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90. Weinberg, *Sociology in the Soviet Union and Beyond*, 60-64.

91. Quoted in Neil Robinson, *Ideology and the Collapse of the Soviet System: A Critical History of Soviet Ideological Discourse* (Aldershot, 1995), 82-83.

92. Ibid., 83.

93. Anna Paretskaya, "A Middle Class without Capitalism? Socialist Ideology and Post-Collectivist Discourse in the Late-Soviet Era," in Neringa Klumbytė, Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, eds., *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964-1985* (Lanham, MD, 2013), 45.

94. See Huxtable, "A Compass in the Sea of Life…," 170-171.

95. See Agranovskii, "Shofer," 2; Kondakov, "M.N.S.," 2; Ziuziukin, "Vrach," 2-3; I. Ziuziukin, "Portovyi gruzchik [Docker]," 19/9/68, 1-3.

96. Bren, "Greengrocer."

The portraits suggest that material considerations were beginning to form a central site of legitimation in the Soviet Union, too. If in the 1950s the idea of working for the "long rouble" was seen as uncultured and shameful, by 1967 the idea that workers might be motivated by their pay packet was uncontroversial. "Do drivers take into account money? Yes, and there's nothing wrong with that," wrote Valerii Agranovskii; Ivan Ziuziukin's portrait of a taxi driver implicitly endorsed the idea that his hero's main motivation was financial.[97] Almost all subjects discussed their consumer desires, which had either been fulfilled or would be soon.[98] A portrait of a steelworker described his television, washing machine, wardrobe, and sideboard (along with a complaint about the unavailability of fridges in Briansk) with the comment: "As you can see, I live well. I even have a little piano;"[99] a shepherd stated that he would like to buy a washing machine, a suite of furniture, a carpet, a motorcycle, a car, a "Rubin" brand television set, and a fridge; a portrait of an engineer described his new living space: "Now they have 'paradise': two apartments, 28 metres."[100] It seemed that everybody, from shepherds to physicists, was essentially alike in pursuit of consumer happiness.

Two things are worth noting about the discourse of consumerism in these portraits. Firstly, there was no mention of variations in access to consumer goods between classes: it appeared that refrigerators and vacuum cleaners were available to all, regardless of social differences.[101] In that sense, there could no suggestion that objects might serve as markers of social distinction, nor any challenge to the official discourse of social egalitarianism. Secondly, unlike the anxieties over "*veshchizm*" that were starting to appear in other publications from the late-1960s onwards,[102] there was little tension between consumer satisfaction and socialist values: individuals could perform their allotted social role and be a cultured Soviet person while still enjoying their rightful consumer rewards. The portraits thus suggested that the hopes and dreams of the new decade would be focused around comfort and satisfaction, while positing a social "convergence" where workers and intellectuals (or even worker-intellectuals) displayed similar patterns of leisure, consumption and work. As such, despite their pretensions to sociological rigour, the paper's "social portraits" were in some ways no less utopian than the Socialist Realist portraits that preceded them: they were a description of the country as the paper's journalists hoped it would become, rather than a scientific analysis of its present-day contradictions.

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97. Agranovskii, "Shofer," 2; Ziuziukin, "Taksist," 4.

98. On this point see Amir Weiner, "Robust Revolution to Retiring Revolution: The Life Cycle of the Soviet Revolution, 1945–1968," *Slavonic and East European Review*, 86, 2 (2008): 208-231.

99. Sokol, "Slesar´," 2.

100. Liashenko, "Chaban," 2; A. Korolenko, "Inzhener [Engineer]," KP, 19/3/68, 2.

101. On the links between class and consumption, see Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era* (Abingdon, 2013), 103-113.

102. Ibid., 50-58; Paretskaya, "Middle Class."

Despite this (or perhaps because of it) most journalists at KP regarded the rubric as a great success, with many articles named as the week's best in editorial discussions, thus bringing their authors a financial bonus.[103] This can be partly attributed to the fact that the articles were the sort of long, literary dissertations that were disliked by readers but loved by journalists. There seems to have been a conscious effort by some authors to refer to "classic" Soviet literary journalism: Ziuziukin's "Taxi Driver" and Ignatenko's "Waiter' implicitly referenced famous articles by some of its "golden pens," such as Mikhail Kol´tsov's "Three Days in a Taxi," Anatolii Gudimov's "Seven Days in a Taxi," and Anatolii Agranovskii's "The Man from the Restaurant." The portraits' literary qualities boosted journalists international self-image, too: one staff member said proudly that the portraits showed that western journalism was "much lower in quality than our best articles."[104] Vladimir Ponizovskii later argued that the real "aroma" of Ignatenko's article, in which he worked alongside the titular waiter, consisted in the fact that the "reader imagines the character of our correspondent, a correspondent of *Komsomol´skaia pravda*."[105] In other words, the aim of the rubric was not just to give an image of the "typical" Soviet worker, but also to give a portrait of the journalist as a creative intellectual, thereby boosting journalists' artistic status.

The articles were also praised for raising important questions about Soviet society in the era of "Developed Socialism."[106] Editorial Board member Inga Prelovskaia lauded the rubric for showing "the social profile of a profession, the philosophy of labour, and … the typology of the contemporary hero."[107] However, it was unclear why these protagonists were heroic and whether they could serve as a mobilising ideal. In fact, the portraits suggested a profound shift in the way lives were narrated. Socialist Realist portraits of contemporaries had typically focused on their subjects' biographical development from ignorance to consciousness, but this sense of movement was absent in the social portraits, whose heroes remained curiously static: qualities and faults alike were to be commented upon, but never developed or ameliorated.

The rubric thus suggested that the nation was entering a period of consolidation, and that heroism no longer required grand revolutionary gestures. Vail´ and Genis spoke of the "collapse of the hierarchy of romantic deeds" in the late 1960s, such that even giving blood became a mark of heroism.[108] Indeed, they saw the language of "interesting work" put forward by features like the social portrait as inimical to the romantic spirit of the sixties.[109] While schemes like BAM were testament to the

103. For rare criticism see KP letuchka, 15/1/69, d. 484, l. 6-7. Unfortunately, the paper's archive of letters was destroyed in the early-1990s so we cannot gauge reader responses.

104. Ibid., 28/3/67, d. 449, l. 20-21.

105. Ibid., 5/9/68, d. 472, l. 43-44.

106. Ibid., 6/6/67, d. 452, l. 1-3; 28/3/67, d. 449, l. 20-21; 4/10/67, d. 455, l. 12-13.

107. KP Party Meeting, 29/9/67, d. 41, l.42. See also KP letuchka, 14/9/67, d. 454, l. 4-5.

108. Petr Vail´, Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: Mir sovetskogo cheloveka. 2-e izd.* [The 60s: The World of the Soviet Person. 2nd Edition] (M., 1998), 137.

109. Ibid., 135-138.

leadership's need to maintain a public façade of revolutionary dynamism, it was no longer clear whether such self-sacrificing heroes were in tune with contemporary values. Correspondent Kira Nikiforova said of a diary by one such "hero":

> Is the true young hero of our time a personally unsettled, wavering person, without their own home, without their own family, for whom the whole poetry of life is difficult, sometimes unjustified and back-breakingly difficult work? I don't agree with this. I don't agree with the raising of personal disorder and asceticism into typical features of the contemporary leading young person.[110]

At a meeting at the end of 1969, Kapitolina Kozhevnikova suggested that the "romantic enthusiasm" of the past had given way to new values: "efficiency and pragmatism." Kozhevnikova did not necessarily disapprove of these values, but stated that the paper's task was to ensure that today's pragmatists did not turn into "cynics" and "careerists" who "neglected all moral categories," but were "harmonious individuals."[111]

But at the same meeting Inna Rudenko argued that the loss of heroes was leading to disillusionment amongst young people. She argued that the loss of heroes had left the paper with an "avalanche of desperate revelations" from readers: "I wanted to do something great, something extraordinary, but I have to simply live: eat, sleep, work."[112] What could the paper do, she asked, to ensure that "young people [possessed] a craving, not just for ideas, but for a concrete ideal"? As the 1970s dawned, the answer was far from clear, and illustrated a growing gap between the Brezhnev leadership's new legitimising basis for Soviet rule, grounded both in material comfort, individual fulfilment and a shared way of life, and the ability of KP's journalists to turn it into a mobilising vision of the future. As such, the sociological aesthetic cultivated by the paper in the late-1960s was unable to offer a solution to the dilemma of what to do with the Soviet hero in a post-heroic age.

Sociology offered journalists a new way of seeing Soviet society. Audience research delivered a more comprehensive understanding of the way readers consumed the press and provided newspapers with a means for targeting readers more effectively. Such research challenged journalists' ideas about their audience, which had hitherto come from letters, reader conferences, and informal contacts. Nevertheless, as we have seen, journalists interpreted such evidence selectively, often choosing to imagine a reader strikingly similar to the educated, purposeful reader that they had imagined before the advent of audience research. Although the concept of the "mass reader" did focus attention on the need for newspaper material to be more accessible to a larger audience, it seems that Vladimir Shliapentokh was right to suggest that the fashion for sociological research was largely cosmetic.

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110. KP letuchka, 12/10/65, d. 386, l. 21.

111. "Proizvodstvennoe soveshchanie KP," 15/12/69, RGASPI, f. 98M, op. 1, d. 491, l. 126-129.

112. Ibid., l. 28-29.

While certain rubrics which surveys had shown to be unpopular disappeared, the idea of the educated (or at least *educable*) reader was never seriously challenged.[113] Once fixed subscription limits returned in the early 1970s, newspapers no longer had any use for sociology's insights and swiftly abandoned audience research.[114] In the last analysis, then, sociology posed more questions than journalists were able to answer. It problematised journalists' picture of their readership, yet they proved reluctant to abandon their goal of enlightening the "mass reader." It challenged traditional journalistic hierarchies of value, but failed to show how the profession could meet readers' needs without catering to so-called "backward interests."

Nevertheless, the use of sociological data in the paper's social portraits provides some evidence of the discipline's impact on journalistic mindsets. Sociologists' revelations about the shifting structure of Soviet society and changing patterns of work, leisure and consumption prompted journalists to reinvigorate the tired palette of Soviet portraiture, and offer a new image of the Soviet individual and a new set of legitimations for Soviet rule. But it was precisely this demand to "legitimate" that was problematic, for the social portraits sat uncomfortably between "research" and agitation. No sooner had authors raised problems about Soviet society than they sought to resolve them: today a shortage of fridges, tomorrow a fully-stocked, modern kitchen, they seemed to say. Journalism was thus caught between the desire to highlight social issues and the need to keep its descriptions within certain discursive limits that were designed to accentuate the "positive."

This points to a fundamental ambiguity in the role of the Soviet press as it entered the era of "developed socialism." Was the newspaper a revolutionary organ which needed to mobilise the population to create a new kind of society, or was the press to become a vehicle of "normalisation" – entertainment, even – which would advertise the benefits citizens were enjoying here and now? The answer to that question seemed to be "both": the newspapers of the 1970s offered readers bombastic portraits of war heroes and self-sacrificing toilers that came straight out of the Stalin-era playbook, but also images of prosperity and individual fulfilment that illustrated the good life that citizens could enjoy in the here-and-now.[115] But would that combination be sufficient to create the selfless toilers of the future – and was that even the main objective any more?

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113. Whether this was something peculiar to KP (which was, after all, a newspaper aimed at young people) is something for future researchers to verify.

114. A similar pattern can be glimpsed in the 1920s (see Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses*, 169-174) but, unlike the 1930s, studies were never completely abandoned in the 1970s: see Ellen Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public* (New York, 1981).

115. Paretskaya, "Middle Class."